

The Four Reactions to God's Word

Every time you teach or speak God's Word, you get a reaction. You will get a reaction because every action produces a reaction. God's Word goes so far as to tell you the four possible categories into which reactions fall. This is found in the fourth chapter of Mark in the form of a parable which Jesus taught his disciples. When we really understand this parable and appropriate its meaning in our lives, it will enlighten us and lift burdens off our minds.

Mark 4:3-12:

Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:

And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:

But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.

And he [Jesus] said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

And when he was alone [after he got away from the crowd], they [the disciples] that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable.

And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all *these* things are done in parables:

That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand....

Two verses later the explanation of this parable begins.

Mark 4:14:

The sower soweth the word.

This explains what the sower of verse 3 was sowing: God's Word. A number of words in this verse intrigue me. First of all, the words, "Hearken; Behold...." These are two similar words in the text and they could both be translated "behold." Thus "...Behold, behold there went out a sower to sow." The repetition is there to get our undivided attention. The word "went" intrigues me, because if a sower is ever going to sow, he has got to get going. If we are going to reach out with God's Word, somebody has got to move. We do not reach out by sitting down, folding our hands and praying constantly. Somebody has got to act. You cannot prepare a dinner by keeping the food in the refrigerator. Somebody has to get in motion. That is the first major point that I see in this parable. Pay attention! A sower went. If we want God's Word to move, we have got to get out there and sow it.

Can you picture a sower sowing in your mind's eye? Think of the old sowing method where a sower wears something like an apron, putting a pile of seed in it and scattering that seed by hand over the cultivated land.

The seed the sower is scattering in Jesus' parable is God's Word. We are not told to go out and sow our theologies, ideologies or opinions. A sower is to sow God's Word.

God says that when you speak His Word, it will not return void. This means that at least you are going to be blessed because you have been faithful in sowing His Word. We do not go out in the world to sow a new doctrine of government or of some new ecological plan. Once we get our lives lined up with God's Word, the rest of life's problems take care of themselves.

If we are not getting things in the personal realm taken care of, it is because we are not coming back to God's Word, because we are not sowing the truth of that rightly divided Word, because people are sowing their private opinions and man-made ideologies.

I recently read a religious periodical from one of the top theological seminaries in the United States. It simply had no respect for the accuracy and integrity of God's Word. If I did not believe in the integrity of God's Word, I would absolutely refuse to stand behind any teaching podium and try to talk to people about being Christian. I would quit. If we cannot believe God's Word, what are we going to believe? On what are we going to found our lives? If you want to play football, you play by a football rule book. If you want to play in God's game, you must go by His rule book. Yet, throughout the whole periodical I read, the writers endeavoured to show that we cannot trust God's rule book. I would rather trust His rule book than all the criticism those writers throw at it. All they try to do is to tear God's Word apart. They never put it together. (By God's grace and mercy, He has allowed those of us who love His Word to at least put some of it together.) I have never seen God's Word fail.

Men come and go, but God's Word lives and abides forever. That Word is the one thing that is important. It is the Word, the Word, and nothing but the Word. That is what has to be sown. You sow God's Word. But remember, when the Word is sown, it can fall on various types of soil.

Mark 4:4:

...some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

This verse is interpreted by Jesus in verse 15.

Mark 4:15:

And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they [the people unto whom the Word has been sown] have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts [Satan steals it].

The wayside is land which is not cultivated for receiving seed. Therefore, the seed never gets a chance to grow. Satan comes immediately and takes that Word away.

If seeds of corn, barley, wheat or grass are sown on hardened ground, they will not grow. You could put a kernel of corn on a wooden surface, pour water over it, stand next to it, and pray endlessly — it still would not grow. For one reason, it is not the proper kind of place to sow

seed. You not only sow the seeds of God's Word, the second thing is that the place where you sow it has to be prepared to receive it.

The first category Jesus demonstrates is the category of people who are not prepared to receive the seed of God's Word; therefore, it cannot grow. Then Satan comes and he immediately steals the Word. That is the one great thing Satan has been interested in stealing, to the end of destroying, since the very beginning of time.

If you are aware of the state of the knowledge of God's Word in many so-called Christians today, you can see that Satan has done a fairly comprehensive job of stealing away God's accurate Word. There is a lot of religion, but not much accurate Word. Religion is man-made; Christianity is what God wrought in Christ Jesus. There is a lot of religion that is called Christianity today, but it is not the true Christianity of the Word. So we must sow the true Word, but at times that seed may fall by the wayside where it is quickly taken away by Satan.

The second type of soil is referred to as stony ground.

Mark 4:5 and 6:

And some [seed] fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:

But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

As we read on in Mark 4, the explanation of this part of the parable is given.

Mark 4:16 and 17:

And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive [Iambanō, manifest] it with gladness;

And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended [stumble and fall].

This category involves the people to whom the Word of God is held forth accurately and who receive it. But, the soil is not deep enough to support roots. Here are the people who hear you teach God's Word and they just bubble with excitement. They are thrilled at the Word they have heard, and they go out and start talking. But when persecution starts, they immediately succumb.

Let me give you an example. Let us say that you just sat through a terrific teaching and for the first time some part of God's Word made sense to you, and you are excited. Then somebody, a day or two later, meets you on the street and says: "You don't believe that poppycock, do you? Dr. Wierwille must have taught you that. Don't you know what he teaches is heretical?" And you reply, "Well, if he is a heretic, I'll discard anything I learned from him." You have no what? No roots. A large tree has to have roots to support it. If you are going to build the greatness of God and the power of God in your life, you have got to be rooted and grounded, because persecution does arise. Whether people agree with God's Word or disagree with it is irrelevant. If nobody believes it, it is still God's Word.

People who hear God's Word and have no roots will not adhere long to God's Word. They flourish immediately and die quickly thereafter. Mark 4 then tells of a third category of circumstances where seed is sown.

Mark 4:7:

And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

Jesus explains this later in Mark 4.

Mark 4:18 and 19:

And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,

And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness [delight] of [in] riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

These people in the third category hear God's Word but either become caught up in the cares of this world or they delight in riches. Thus, God's Word is choked out and becomes unfruitful to them. They are people who try to straddle the fence, holding onto the world with one hand and onto the Word with the other. You cannot do this and produce fruit. You cannot serve God and mammon. You must get to the place where you just stand before God, claim the promises of God and live accordingly. Then you produce fruit.

The cares of this world weigh people down; they choke out the Word. Many times this involves material things when people think they have to keep up with the Smiths or the Joneses.

Recently a young couple just finished the class on Power for Abundant Living and were really blessed with the greatness of God's Word when they saw the depth of it. They had been going through the same experience which so many young people go through, because they wanted the same standard of living as their neighbors. They had a relatively new house, car, TV, washer, dryer and so on. But, it was all they could manage every month just to pay off the loans to the loan company. "What should I do?" the husband asked me, as he and his wife were tired of the monthly rat race.

I asked him, "What do you want to do?"

"I want to get out of this. I want to be free to learn God's Word without all the pressure I've been feeling."

"Well," I said, "why don't you give your possessions back to the loan company?"

That can be a frightening thing. He had a house with a little bit of equity in it; he and his wife had made an investment.

However, I suggested to that man that he give all these possessions back to the loan company. So he did. But the loan company said: "We don't want them back. We want you to keep them. We'll refinance your debts." The loan company almost leaned over backward to get him to keep the possessions. Well, the man had enough determination that he refused, and hence, he got out from under his burdening debt. I will tell you what he did. The couple had given up an almost-new car, so he went out and bought himself a clunker for \$500. It just plugged along, but it got him to

his job. And at the end of the week, he was paid just as much salary with his \$500 clunker as when he had that new \$7,000 car. That couple is now living in a nice apartment. They do have a TV and other appliances. They have got the things they need, and they are living comfortably. He told me recently that he and his wife do not owe anybody five cents.

That is living free of burdens! Instead of the loan company telling you when the payments are due, try believing God to have your needs met. Pay for things in cash and live within your means, not outside of them.

The cares of this world can keep you from manifesting the greatness of God, so you have to work it out with God and His Word to stay out of entanglements. There is a saying, "Choose your rut carefully, you may be in it a long time." As long as we have food, clothing, shelter and good health, we are more than abundantly blessed. What a tremendous privilege it is to have food, clothing and shelter, to have the Lord Jesus Christ as our saviour, to have his peace within, to have that quiet serenity, to know that we are children of God and that all hell cannot stop us from going to heaven. What a joy! We cannot buy that at the corner grocery store. We get that only by believing God's Word.

The sower sows God's Word. Every time he sows it there will be a reaction. Mark 4 names three categories of unfruitful reaction. Those are people who did not get the results of believing God's Word; they reap the consequences of not believing it. You will either get the results of the Word or, if you fall into one of the above three categories, you reap the consequences of it. However, look at the fourth category, the one that brings bountiful results.

Mark 4:8:

And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.

Again, Jesus explains this passage.

Mark 4:20:

And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive *it*, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

The seed is the Word. The Word of God is sown on good ground, ground that is ready to receive it — fertile soil. Here the process of bearing a yield is a three-step process: hear the Word, receive it and bring forth fruit. And when fruit is harvested a while after it is sown, it has increased its yield, for example, thirty, sixty or one hundredfold. That is the abundant life in fullness.

For dinner some fellows may eat three pieces of turkey to fill themselves up. Another fellow may eat one piece and yet all will be filled. It will also be like that in the gathering together, the return of Christ. Everybody will be rewarded and given according to his capacity to receive. All will be filled. In Mark 4, that person who produces a thirtyfold increase is full; the person producing sixtyfold is full; and the person producing one hundredfold is full. That is why everybody's need is met according to a person's ability to receive. This makes everybody full. God is no respecter of persons.

The Word of God is sown by a sower who has to go out to the field and sow. In sowing the Word, he will encounter four basic types of reactions. Do you know what happens to me? As a sower, I sow the Word, and a little persecution comes. A person I love very much trips out. Do you know what I do? I go back home and start crying. I cry, "Lord, what did I do wrong?"

Then I start condemning myself for not witnessing better, for not under-shepherding better, for not doing this and not doing that. And I condemn myself for days; I become so depressed.

That is wrong! It does not say one place in Mark 4 that the sower is condemned. This is a tremendous reality. Every individual is accountable to God for his life. You and I are accountable for holding forth God's Word. We do not go into isolation and condemnation because three of those categories reject or quickly turn away from God's Word.

In one record in the Gospels, the disciples ministered to a boy who was not delivered from his affliction. The father became critical and said to Jesus, "Hey, those are your twelve disciples. You are with them all the time. You are the one who taught them the Word. So why is it that they couldn't heal my son?" Jesus said to the man, "If you can believe, all things are possible...." Jesus put the responsibility where it belonged. He never condemned himself or the apostles.

Of the four types of ground, three do not yield fruit for the harvest. Every time the Word is rightly divided and held forth, you will see that the reaction to it will be in one of those four categories. I have never seen these reactions fail throughout my years of teaching and researching the Word. God's Word always holds true.

We need to sow that Word no matter what people say about it. I am responsible for my faithfulness to the Word; I am not responsible for the crop increase. Paul said, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." The important thing was that the Word was planted and cultivated. But, no man can give the increase. It takes God to bring about that. And, the increase is wonderfully abundant when it falls on good ground.

Have you ever observed a head of ripe wheat? The stalk started out from the germination of just one grain, but the head of that wheat stalk when it is finally full will perhaps have thirty or more grains on it. That is not a bad increase, is it? That is how God's Word is. The Word never returns void when it is sown on receptive ground. If the three categories reject it, it still does not return void, because God's Word is faithful, and God will bless you for being a faithful steward of the Word. When the seed falls on good ground and produces thirty, sixty or a hundredfold, the person sowing God's Word and the one receiving it get blessed. Let us start moving the greatness of God's Word and seeing a mighty increase. Let us move the magnificence of God's Word, for it is the Word of God that is the will of God. That is what blesses people — it blesses us when we speak it; it blesses others when they hear and believe it.